



In Honour of
Miss Delia Bacon Salter



Delia Bacon Salter
(1811–1859)

“The slovenly manner in which most men are content to do their thinking.”
—Macaulay

Chelsea, 8 June, 1853.

My Dear Madam,

Will you kindly dispense with the ceremony of being called on (by sickly people, in this hot weather), and come to us on Friday evening to tea at 7. I will try to secure Mr. Spedding at the same time; and we will deliberate what is to be done in your Shaksper affair. A river steamer will bring you within a gunshot of us. You pronounce *Chainie Row* and get out at Cadogan Pier, which is your fast landing place in Chelsea. Except Mrs. C. and the chance of Spedding, there will be nobody here.

Yours very sincerely,
T. Carlyle.

“My visit to Mr. Carlyle was very rich. I wish you could have heard him laugh. Once or twice I thought he would have taken the roof of the house off. At first they were perfectly stunned he and the gentleman [Spedding] he had invited to meet me. They turned black in the face at my presumption. “Do you mean to say,” so and so, said Mr. Carlyle, with his strong emphasis; and I said that I did; and they both looked at me with staring eyes, speechless for want of words in which to convey their sense of my audacity. At length Mr. Carlyle came down on me with such a volley. I did not mind it the least. I told him he did not know what was in the Plays if he said that, and no one could know who believed that that booby wrote them. It was then that he began to shriek. You could have heard him a mile. I told him too that I should not think of questioning his authority in such a case if it were not with me a matter of knowledge. I did not advance it as an opinion. They began to be a little moved with my coolness at length, and before the meeting was over they agreed to hold themselves in a state of readiness to receive what I had to say on the subject. I left my introductory statement with him. In the course of two or three days he wrote to me to ask permission to show my paper to Mr. Monckton Milnes, who had expressed a wish to see it, inviting me to come there again very soon. He told me I had left a beautiful handkerchief there, which Mrs. Carlyle would keep till I came. He also enclosed to me a letter of introduction to Mr. Collier, which he had taken the pains to obtain for me from another literary gentleman. I have not yet sent it. That was five weeks ago.”

What a fascinating recollection to read from Mr. Carlyle’s invitation and from Delia’s writings of her response to that visit. Of greater fascination is her belief that archives, of Bacon’s secret philosophical society, were buried somewhere, perhaps in more places than one; that she had collected very strong vibes pointing to a tomb, Bacon’s tomb that would throw some light on her viewpoint. She perceived to know Spenser’s tomb contained, or did when it was closed, verses ‘and the pens that writ them’; verses of his brother poets, the poets of this school called Raleigh’s School.

We may say now that this investigation of hers was beyond any fault of law, or any faith, and certainly reason it to her feminine intuition and overflowed Baconian love.

Delia was a cultured, finely educated American teacher. Emerson was greatly impressed with her ideas and gave her letters to friends in England, but when she presented her arguments to these English people, she was treated with scorn and ridicule that eventually broke her heart. Her brother from the States molested her character and ever since her time (around 1856) hundreds of books and thousands of pamphlets have been written for and against the Baconian authorship that Delia so supported.¹

In November 1853, Delia took lodgings at St Albans, attracted by its association with the great Chancellor Bacon, to whom it gave a title and a tomb. For the next eleven months, until the beginning of November 1854, Delia remained at St Albans pursuing her work with exhausting

¹ Mrs. Dodge: *Shakespeare-Bacon*, 1916.

eagerness. According to Mrs. Hawthorne and Mr. Emerson's correspondence, Delia was now in the absolute belief that proof could be found of her theory and it lay under Shaksper's tombstone.

"I have found by experiment that I can make the examination thoroughly, and leave the stone exactly as I find it, and I could do it alone, weak as I am, now, without anyone to lift a finger to help me. I have promised to perform the experiment without removing a particle of the stone, or leaving a trace of harm, and what is very gratifying to me under the circumstances, neither the clerk nor the vicar appears disposed to take it for granted that I am insane. I have told them my reasons for it."

Would walls have ears, the woods would not creak back what we utter. Delia was unintentionally putting pressure on the British Literature wits of the day. About the beginning of April 1857, her book was published with a long and laborious title: *The Philosophy of the Plays of Shakspeare Unfolded. By Delia Bacon. With a Preface by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Author of The Scarlet Letter etc.* It was in form an octavo, of about seven hundred pages, including a hundred pages separately numbered of the author's *Introduction*. This *Introduction*, after a statement, not too compact or clear, of *The Proposition*, contained a review of *The Age of Elizabeth, and the Elizabethan Men of Letters*; extracts from an altogether separate, and unpublished, *Life of Raleigh; Raleigh's School*, and to conclude the volume, *The New Academy*.

When this work of Delia's, which alone she had for years been willing to live for, was completed and failed to arouse public interest, her life was also ended; her brother got the wind of all her activities in England. His unstopping germ about her so-called suspected 'mental disturbances' to her new friends she found in England and to the people, who began to respect and care for her, began to take its form.

As authors, we know nothing regarding mental disturbances; but this much can be told with some logical opinion on its non-conception, and that is that you do not see lunacy in the street one day, pick it up, and plant it into your brain. Delia Bacon was a damn good teacher before she left for England; picked up a sniff of controversy in that lunatic Shaksper fellow the Stratfordians were crowning a God (due to Garrick) and she began to stir or blow at the dust, if you will, to get the attention she needed on the subject. Who hasn't truthfully thought of digging up Shaksper to throw stones at him, for whatever the reason?

Delia's beliefs and actions were not criminal to the world; she was not hurting the stuffed-up scholars of Stratford or the prestigious publishing companies of that time, as those Spedding had published under. It did not hurt her friends she had made, nor did it hurt admirable men like Emerson and Hawthorne who were more than willing to lose their reputation to support her notions. I wonder if these gentlemen, also, were mentally disturbed; or are we, for liking the notion to want to dig up Shaksper and Be-Shaksper him.

Delia's mistake was one in our opinion: that she voiced her humble thoughts to the world; a world that is mean and sometimes inconsiderate, and it is a world that has not changed since the 1800's and will not change in the future years to come until, as Jimmy Hendrix stated, the power of love overcomes the love of power.

Delia Bacon's story is a proud one as is Francis Bacon's; it is not a pitiful story to be looked upon with belittlement. In her logical way, in her unfortunate age of repression, and with her constant low economic means, she was a champion as Goddess Athena was, charging among the sorts like Carlyle, Spedding, Emerson and that forger Collier. She had the tenacity and spunk to voice her beliefs: she was American.

But give a lie a quarter of an hour's start and who shall overtake it? And since youth ages, immaturity is outgrown; ignorance can be educated, and drunkenness sobered, but stupid lasts forever.² The rumours sailing from America to England, by her dear brother's unjust claims, made the sun more bashful and hide behind a grey cloud to vanish this Lady's shadow.

Delia's accomplishments will not be found in any history books, for great ambition and conquest, without contribution, is without significance; they deprived Delia from her contribution to the world, and that was to prove Francis Bacon was the Spear-shaker poet who lit the candles of Angels and Devils, and not some shakie-bag actor, who probably had a sharkie-catchie name, who supposedly existed at the same time as Bacon, who hypothetically could have gone to school, who but surely knew how to write his name, it would seem, in the actual town of Stratford.

In December 1857, Delia was removed to a private asylum for a small number of insane persons at Henley-in-Arden, in the forest of Arden, eight miles from Stratford. This was the same fairy forest where Francis Bacon gave heaven thanks and would dissolve within philomantic paths beyond the banks of Avon. A place where every palace, every city almost had its peculiar walks, cloisters, terraces, groves, theatres, pageants, games, and several recreations; every country, some professed gymnasts to exhilarate their minds, and exercise their bodies.³

After five years in England, Delia was:

“Returned to her native land. She was brought very soon to the Retreat at that city of Hartford where so many years of her childhood had been spent, and there she remained until the second day of September 1859, as her brother then wrote: *she died, clearly and calmly trusting in Christ, and thankful to escape from tribulation and outer into rest*. In the old burying-ground at New Haven she was laid, in the parcel of ground with her brother's family.”⁴

² Aristophanes.

³ Basil Brown: *Law Sports at Gray's Inn*, 1921.

⁴ Article: *Delia Bacon: The Advance, ubi supra*.

Delia Bacon was a woman of remarkable intellect, a profound scholar, and merits a high place among the literary women of America; yet she and Smith, as well as Holmes, Mrs. Pott, Reed, and other faithful and conscientious students who have followed them, have been viciously assailed by those interested in Shakespearian books as authors, owners of copyright, their friends, and would-be friends; in fact, they have suffered the usual martyrdom of advocates of new truth by our modern Ephesians. Said Lee:

“Why should Baconian theorists have any following outside lunatic asylums?”

Dana stated that:

“The Mattoid flourishes in America because we have so large a proportion of half-educated minds.”

It was Churton Collins who stated:

“And so this epidemic spreads till it has now assumed the proportions, and many of the characteristics of the Middle Ages.”

A writer in the *Literary World* calls Mr. Reed’s scholarly books, ‘a positive disgrace to literature.’ Brandes says:

“A troop of less than half-educated people have put forth the doctrine that Shakespeare did not write the plays and poems attributed to him. Here it has fallen into the hands of raw Americans and fanatical women.”

Continuing, Elze wrote that:

“The so-called Bacon Theory is a disease of the same species as table-turning.”

And Townsend stated:

“Dirty work requires its peculiar instruments.”

The *Athenaeum* of the time wrote:

“Mr. Smith denies the appropriation of Miss Delia Bacon’s theory. The question may be of slight importance which of two individuals first conceived a crazy notion.”

And Furnivall wrote to Reed:

“Providence is merciful, and the US folk are tolerant; you’d have been strung up on the nearest lamp-post else.”

Stapfer sneeringly alluded to the authorship controversy as:

“The famous paradox brought forward from time to time by some lunatic.”

Engel stigmatized Baconians as:

“Orthodox minded lunatics, distinguished from such as tenant asylums in that they are still at large. People of this brain-sick habit, maniacs, are as hard to convince of their error as they who imagine themselves God Almighty, or the Emperor of China, or the Pope.”

White had stated:

“When symptoms of the Bacon-Shaksper craze manifest themselves, the patient should be immediately carried off to an asylum, etc.”

Robertson is nearly as vitriolic, yet his book, *The Baconian Heresy*, is but an apology for a defence of his thesis. One could quote a number as vulgar as the following from a writer in the *New York Herald*, who signs his name, B.J.A. date unknown:

“The idea of robbing the world of Shakespeare for such a stiff, legal-headed old jackass as Bacon, is a modern invention of fools.”

There is no hope for men who treat fellow students in any field of literary labour in this manner. The charge they make against them is lunacy, and especially, lack of scholarship; both words are favourites with them; yet Disraeli, Gervinus, Hawthorne, Judge Nathaniel Holmes,⁵ Lowell, Dickens, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Massey, Gladstone, Winchell, Whittier, Professor Cantor, Judge Wilde, and many others who have expressed opinions adverse to these monopolists of scholarship, occupy quite as high rank in the world of letters as they; indeed, when we examine the work of the Stratfordian revilers, we are astounded at its character and lack of accuracy. Probably in all literature there is no more faulty work to be found than in their treatment of the Shakespeare works, from Rowe to Lee.⁶

⁵ W.H. Wyman. *Bibliography of the Bacon-Shakespeare Controversy*, 1884: Hon. Nathaniel Holmes, graduate of Harvard University, in the class of 1837. Since 1839 he practiced law in St. Louis for the greater part of the time, but was, from 1865 to 1868, Judge of the Supreme Court of Missouri, and from 1868 to 1872, a Professor of Law in the Law School of Harvard. He retired from professional life, and resided at Cambridge, Mass.

⁶ C. Stopes. *The Bacon Shakspeare Question*, 1888.